



IROS PERSEVERE AND OVERCOME

AND THAT'S JUST FOR FUN

A RANGE OF SPORTS ATTRACT IROS WHEN THEY ARE LOOKING FOR ACTIVE PASTIMES. EACH PROVIDES A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE THAT CAN INFLUENCE POSITIVE WORK RESULTS.

By Alexandra Walsh

Ever wonder what your fellow IROs do for fun? Do they choose sports or other physical activities that mimic their professional life? Or do they look for activities that allow them to escape the IR world?

Of nine IR professionals interviewed about their recreational pastimes of choice, some have a passion for physical effort that provides an escape from all investor-related brain activity. Others seek a sport that removes distractions and offers them a chance to think more clearly about complex work scenarios. But what these IROs all seem to have in common is an activity that shares similarities with their job and the type of personality it takes to excel at both.

Iron Women

“My earliest experiences in IR were very similar to my first Ironman triathlon because in both cases, I didn’t know what I was walking into, only that I was getting battered around,” recalls Heather Anne Kos, IRC, vice president, investor relations and corporate communications, at Ingredion. “I was looking for an outlet from the stress and the constant need to try to control things at work. But after I completed my first Ironman, I would tell myself no matter how bad things get at work, I learned to swim to be able to compete in an Ironman, and if I can conquer that, what can’t I overcome at work?”

Kos explains that an Ironman competition includes a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile marathon. And by the way,

when Kos isn't competing in an Ironman, she enjoys mountain hiking and ultra-marathons, which she explains are just 50-mile races.

"I use the training time to think about work," Kos says. "Running and swimming are meditative and calming and great for mulling over and solving problems. It's very cathartic."

"I've had great Ironman races and bad Ironman races that haven't gone the way I want them to, but either way, at the end of the day, I dust myself off and get going," adds Kos. "Unexpected turns are part of the journey and good practice for tempering disappointment – whether that's competing or at work."

Leslie Kratcoski, IRC, vice president for investor relations, at Snap-on Incorporated, calls herself "sufficiently average" as a runner and triathlete and like Kos, uses training as a way to relieve stress.

"I wasn't at all athletic as a kid and later exercised sporadically," Kratcoski recalls. "But after the birth of my second child, I wanted to get fit and I started running and then moved on to biking. Then my husband got the itch to try a triathlon and I tried one the following year. Since then, I've done two or three triathlons every season."

Also similar to Kos, Kratcoski says that running, biking, and swimming provide her an environment to think problems through and bring clarity to something she is having difficulty solving.

"Being a triathlete is also something that allows me to define myself in addition to being an IR professional, a wife, and a mom," Kratcoski admits. "It belongs to me."

"I think people who are involved in athletics have a drive or ability to accomplish challenges and work well in teams and similar environments," Kratcoski says. "It's also a way to practice short or long-term goal setting in an environment other than work, but that circles back to help you in your professional life."

Not So Easy Riders

Derek Cole's interest in road cycling began more than 20 years ago and became even more enthralling when he moved from the East Coast to Denver, and could ride in the breathtaking Colorado mountains. The president of Investor Relations Advisory Solutions particularly enjoys Century Races, which are 100 miles in distance.

Cole sees at least four similarities between road cycling and investor relations. First, there's the training that's required for long distance cycling and the ongoing training and education that's necessary to stay abreast of changes in the investor relations field.

Second, just as it's important to be consistent in cycling training, it's also important to be consistent in IR education, networking, and learning.

Third, the significance of preparing well in advance for a big race is similar to preparing in advance for an earnings call or other investor event.

And fourth, adaptability is necessary for both IR and cycling, whether adjusting to changes in the course mid-race or the ability to shift on the fly depending on what's happening in the markets.

Cole points out that a collaborative approach in the IR and racing setting is critically important. "Whether you are the sole practitioner of the IR function at your company or you work within an IR team, you can't drive the IR strategy alone. You will always be working hand-in-hand with the broader management team that provides the strategic support function for the organization because you get more accomplished working together," Cole concludes. "Similarly, road cycling is a really selfless sport because you are part of a team that has to work and train really well together during competition. And while only one member of the team will cross the finish line first as the winner, that cyclist is only able to do so because the whole team

worked together throughout the race."

Rebecca Gardy, an investor relations officer for the newly public cyber-security company, SecureWorks Corp., is quick to point out that she hasn't shattered any Olympic records and believes her cycling experience probably pales in comparison to her peers who compete in marathons, triathlons, and Ironman races. But, her riding is where her heart takes her as she begins training and fundraising for her third 100-mile Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) Ride for a Cure event.

Along with her husband and her son, who was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at age 12 in 2012, Gardy attempted her first 114-mile Tour de Tucson ride in 2013, but was hampered by pouring rain and 40 degree temperatures, the first occurrence of bad weather at the event in 38 years.

Gardy remembers with amusement her first training ride. "I thought I was going to die and it was only 13.8 miles! But what kept me going is the reality that my son never has the option of quitting. He has to check his blood sugar 10 times a day, so how could I just give up when he has no choice but to soldier on."

"In 2014, we accomplished our goal of completing a Century Ride crossing three states, two bridges, and one mighty river, and my son and I finished the crossing line hand in hand," Gardy recalls.

"This new hobby has changed me in the workplace because it has certainly taught me to persevere, to train, and to tackle seemingly insurmountable challenges." And, Gardy adds, "I have joined a community of amazing individuals and learned a level of empathy and understanding for my colleagues. By coming forward in my office environment as an advocate for this disease, others have come forth with their own challenges and shared their own vulnerabilities. This has drawn me closer to my colleagues and given people insight



Clockwise from top left: Road cyclist Derek Cole, triathlete Leslie Kratoski, hockey player James Grant at the rink, and Evan Pondel on a standup paddle surfboard.

into my level of commitment for something greater than myself.”

Pat Davidson, vice president of investor relations at OshKosh Corp., also rides for JDRF. He became an amateur biker to help rehabilitate his knee after surgery 20 years ago, but when his seven-year old daughter was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes 12 years ago, it hit his family like a ton of bricks, he says.

“JDRF is a great organization and I wanted to do something to give back,” Davidson explains. “I dove in hook, line, and sinker and began with the Death Valley ride, the granddaddy of them all, and now I’ve done a 100-mile ride 11 years in a row.”

Davidson says typically in the summer, he’ll cycle three or four times a week, and take longer rides, or ride both days on the weekends. “I’m always scavenging for time,” Davidson admits. “Cycling helps me get my

mind off IR. I have to take time away from work and decompress.”

In addition to immeasurably improving his physical fitness, which helps him put in longer hours at work when needed, cycling helps Davidson build mental toughness. “After accomplishing a 40-hour ride in challenging weather conditions, as Dr. Seuss would say, I feel like I can lick 30 tigers today.”

The Mavericks

The next four IR pros choose other sports for their recreational outlets. The parallels between sport and work and the personality type it takes to succeed at both are unmistakable.

The Chess of Racket Sports

For instance, Bob Burton, managing director, financial communications at

Lambert, Edwards & Associates, notes that in his sport, squash, players have to think very fast and try to use the angles of the wall and different shots to get in and out of situations.

“With my kind of personality, the same reasons I like IR are tied to the reasons I like squash,” Burton notes. “The intensity of squash is attractive, and it’s called the chess of racquet sports because of the high level of concentration it requires. It’s a lot like IR in the need for quick analysis and quick decisions and the ability to deal with circumstances that change very rapidly and change as a result of what you do.”

Burton says that when he’s had a long day or something is on his mind, squash washes all that away and relaxes him. “I don’t want a physical activity where I take my work problems with me; I want to wipe the slate clean after a long day. Plus, it’s a

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very social sport and I usually have a beer afterwards with my squash partner.”

Burton plays squash several times a week and since it’s an urban sport, he can usually find a squash court and a partner on his frequent business travels. “As a member of U.S. Squash, I have squash friends in every city and compete in tournaments around the country. Playing squash has been my principal form of recreation for more than 30 years and I hope to continue to play for years to come.”

A pledge that’s easy to believe since Burton is a Michigan Masters Champion in the age 60-plus category.

Humility and Beer

James Grant, IRC, vice president for investor relations at Signet Jewelers, played pond hockey growing up in suburban New York and continues his love for the game in an adult hockey league.

“There are two aspects of hockey that impact my work in IR,” Grant explains. “First, you learn humility – you can score a goal in a shift and two shifts later do something so stupid you might be responsible for a goal-against. And second, the value of beer consumption and camaraderie. Beer is a very important part of adult league hockey and no matter what happens during the game, someone’s always brought a cold 24 pack to help keep things in perspective.”

In addition to the physical activity that makes him able to handle his job better – Grant guesses he loses four pounds per game – the team aspect of hockey instills values that are also very important in the office. “We always focus on being positive on the bench, on the ice, and in the locker room,” Grant notes. “You have certain expectations for certain people and you know everyone will play their best to the level of their ability. I think a supportive and positive office culture is so important too. Things go on during the day and you can spin them as positive or negative

but like most people in my profession, I have a comfortable life and I try to keep it all in perspective and be positive and grateful.”

Grant notes that adult league hockey is a great leveler as he plays with people between the ages of 25 and 60, and who might work in hourly manufacturing or be investment bankers. “It’s very refreshing to play with a diversity of people who you enjoy. That and the value of the journey along the way trumps anything that may happen, including a rough day at work.”

Paintball Learning

What Gregg Lampf, vice president, investor relations at CIENA Corp., likes best about paintball, which is based on the schoolyard game of capture the flag, is strategizing, blowing off steam, and taking his mind off things.

“I prefer being on a team that likes to strategize,” Lampf says. “I try to position myself as a leader or part of the leadership team, breaking the team into positions, keeping the team organized, and keeping the strategy in place.” He says more times than not, people are looking for a leader and he likes to help people see how strategizing leads to success rather than just picking up a paintball gun and firing away.

Lampf says that paintball, like his work in IR, requires assessing what kind of people are on your team, their strengths, weaknesses, and interests. “You make these assessments in real-time, try to exert some leadership and come to consensus. All of that is relevant to what I do, especially assessing people you’re working with, internally or externally.”

Riding the Waves of IR and the Sea

Evan Pondel, president of Pondel Wilkinson, has been surfing and paddle boarding most of his life, even when he attended college in the Midwest and surfed on the Great Lakes with the help of a lot of wind chop.

Now back in California, Pondel surfs once a week. “It’s a good outlet that helps reset priorities and allows me to think clearly without a lot of distractions as it’s one of the few places you can’t bring a cell phone, forcing you to be present and focused on your environment,” Pondel says. “Most of the time I’m surfing, I’m sitting on my board, waiting for a wave and lost in my thoughts. That’s the time I let my mind drift and escape from daily pressures, relax, and get perspective.”

Pondel believes there are lots of parallels to be drawn between surfing and IR. “Navigating the investor relations world is very similar to navigating swells and series of waves,” Pondel muses. “Once the waves are up, I have to be really alert and aggressive, think strategically, and set myself apart from the other surfers as I decide which wave to go after. In IR I am always thinking about entry point and strategic maneuvers and reading executives and handling investors – and that’s very much like reading a wave to determine if it will mean a good ride versus wiping out and falling off my board.”

Pondel believes the self-confidence that surfing brings to his life spills over into his professional world. “You have to really commit to a wave that you want to ride much the same way that you have to commit to IR and can’t do it half way – you’re either all in or you’re essentially bobbing in the water.”

“I try to reflect on the waves I commit to and successfully catch when I surf and try to bring that energy into my work week,” notes Pondel. “I paddle as hard as I can for the people I represent and it generally pays off in a gratifying way. Whether it’s surfing or IR, if I work hard and I’m diligent and remain focused, I’m going to be more successful.” **IRU**

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