

THE IRONWOMAN

A supremely physical sport, triathlon is not for the faint-hearted and Anu Vaidyanathan, who has pursued it seriously over the last six years, is gearing up for the Ironman, a grueling event in which she is a regular.

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DECCAN CHRONICLE

Pursuing a sport which is probably not for the masses, Anu Vaidyanathan has carved a niche for herself. A triathlete, the Bengalurean has explored territories that no Indian has gone before.

A successful businesswoman — she is also the CEO of Patent-n- Mark — an intellectual patent rights company, Anu specialises in a unique sport.

The 30-year-old is the country's first woman athlete to conquer Ironman, an extreme form of triathlon involving several hundred kilometres of cycling, running, and swimming.

At a time, when it's extremely difficult to juggle careers, Anu has mastered it smoothly. Anu recently wed Ashish, a fellow-alumni from Punjab, but continues to follow a strict regi-

men as far as her training is concerned.

"There is no doubt it is very difficult sport. But that's what I always wanted to do. And so far, I have enjoyed a great ride," says Anu.

But it wasn't until 2005 that Anu's love for adventure and athletics came to the fore. Having spent seven years in the United States pursuing academics, she came back to India to follow her dream and met with a lot of apprehensions.

"Though personally there was no-one to stop me training, it was quite difficult to begin with. My parents are my best friends, and when I told them I wanted to get into this sport, they were fully behind me. But people were never too friendly when I started training six years ago, wearing baggy shorts near RVC College," Anu recalls her early days.

But determined as she was, Anu didn't look back. "Until 2007 nobody knew what I was into. Now things have changed. We have a lot of running clubs and competitions, so the situation is much better now. My neighbours know what I am doing and the media is also showing a lot of interest. So it's a welcome change," she says.

This year, Anu chose New Zealand to gear up for the season, but an earthquake that struck the region in February, left many traumatized, including the triathlete, who was based in Christchurch at that point of time.

"I can never forget that. The incident changed the whole landscape.

We couldn't sleep for whole two weeks as we would keep thinking about it. I could have been travelling in a bus or train at that time but stayed back at home waiting for a call from a client. It was a very stressful time but you have to take all these things in stride.

"But things are fine now, though the season hasn't got off to a running start. But I have achieved 60 percent of what I had set out for in terms of preparation," Anu explains.

Since then, Anu has taken part in three triathlons and is now looking forward to race in Canada in late July and in Australia following that.

"Winning an Ironman title is still a dream. Honestly, I am not very close to achieving it and it may take many more years. But I am committed to it and ready to work hard to win the Ironman. Every athlete should have a life-size dream and I have one too," says Anu, who has roped in Siri Lindley, a former short-course world champion, as her coach.

Anu is thankful to Timex, which has been supporting her for the last couple of years. "I am very grateful to Timex for sup-

porting me. It needs lot of courage in India to support other sports than cricket, and I really appreciate that they have been sponsoring me."

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Anu Vaidyanathan is ready for the new season. A PHOTOGRAPH BY OMPRAKASH