

**WHY
I TRI**



“I DID IMUK IN HONOUR OF MY FRIEND”

With no triathlon experience, Ruben den Hartog undertook an Ironman to honour a friend he lost to suicide

I was lying on a beach in France when the thought of doing an Ironman popped into my head. I immediately thought of doing it as a fundraiser in honour of my friend Jochem, who committed suicide three years ago. He was 20.

I usually don't believe in destiny, but that evening I saw on Facebook that it would have been Jochem's birthday that day. Back at home I immediately enrolled in IMUK.

When I told Jochem's parents about my plan, they were very emotional. I asked them to pick a charity for my fundraiser. They chose Grip op je Dip, a Dutch non-profit institution that supports young people with depressive thoughts.

I was at work when I got the call that Jochem had committed suicide. My world collapsed. His parents thought he was with his boyfriend, and vice versa. I knew Jochem struggled with depression. But I never thought he would end his own life. We were part of a group of friends that were really tight. Jochem was an amazing storyteller, he could always make us laugh.

RUBEN DEN HARTOG

Ruben den Hartog is a 22-year-old physical therapy graduate from the Netherlands. He completed his first Ironman in Bolton in July in honour of his friend Jochem, who committed suicide at the age of 20.

“When it was finally my turn to cross the finish line, I choked”

I didn't have any triathlon experience. Most guys my age start with Olympic distance, but I took a gap year between studies and had time to train for an Ironman so it felt like the right time. I was especially inexperienced in swimming. During my first session I got a shoulder injury and couldn't swim for a month.

After 10 months of training non-stop it was finally time for the race. I struggled a lot during the bike. I'd cycled in the Austrian and French Alps, but this bike course was by far the toughest I'd ever ridden. It was brutal. It was a constant mix of steep climbing with technical and dangerous downhills.

The British crowds were really something else. Riding up those climbs I felt like I was riding Alpe d'Huez in the Tour de France – there were people with cowbells and drums, shouting my name and cheering me on. Some competitors would even ride alongside me saying: “You can do this!”

I'll never forget crossing the finish. I was eyeing the carpet every time I passed it, hearing, “You are an Ironman!”. When it was finally my turn, with the crowds and my friends and family cheering, I choked. It was an emotional moment.

Depression is a much bigger issue than people think, we only see the tip of the iceberg. I hope the money from the fundraiser will help a lot of youngsters. But even if it only prevents one person from committing suicide, it will have all been worth it. **220**

Find out more about Ruben's fundraising here: http://bit.ly/IMR_A